

forever marred by the plague of gun violence.

COVID-19 is not the only epidemic claiming innocent lives in America. Last year alone, 20,000 Americans were killed by gun violence, the highest number in almost two decades. Most of these incidents never reached the headlines, but we cannot allow ourselves to become numb to their devastation. After one of the most difficult years in American history, we all want our lives and our country to return to normal. But not this normal—oh, no, not the normal that accepts everyday gun violence as a matter of course, an incidental risk to living in these United States of America. We cannot, we must not accept that as normal. We must not shrink from our moral obligation to act.

Two years ago, the Republican leader, then in the majority, promised that this Chamber would have a real debate on gun violence in this country. It never happened. Even the former President made some noises about supporting commonsense gun safety measures before quickly retreating, the result, once again, of bitter, reflexive opposition by the NRA to any progress and fear among so many Republicans of what the NRA might do to them if they spoke truth to power.

Well, now we don't have a Republican majority. We have a Democratic one. This time is going to be different. A Democratic majority in the Senate is going to act. I have committed to put legislation to expand background checks on the floor of the Senate. We will debate it. We will vote on it.

Just yesterday, my colleague Senator DURBIN led the Judiciary Committee in hearing from scores of witnesses about proposals to reduce gun violence that the Senate might take up.

I have started the process to make legislation to combat hate crimes against Asian Americans, led by Senators HIRONO and Representative MENG in the House, available for action on the floor.

I have been told by so many Asians in New York that they are afraid just to walk down the street, something they used to do easily. I have seen the pain and fear in their faces as I have attended the rallies in New York.

Make no mistake, under the Democratic majority the Senate will debate and address the epidemic of gun violence in this country.

NOMINATION OF RACHEL LELAND LEVINE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on the Levine nomination, today, the Senate will confirm the nomination of Rachel Levine, Pennsylvania's top health official, to be the next Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The Biden administration has brought many historic firsts into its ranks, including the first openly gay

Cabinet Secretary of any Agency. The confirmation of Rachel Levine represents another important milestone for the American LGBTQ community. She will be the first openly transgender official ever confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The arc of history is long, but it keeps bending in the direction of justice.

As transgender Americans suffer higher rates of abuse, homelessness, and depression than almost every other group, it is important to have national figures like Dr. Levine, who, by virtue of being in the public spotlight, will help break down barriers of ignorance and fear.

Pennsylvania's political leaders say Dr. Levine has forced people in their State to better understand the transgender community. One State legislator said:

She has robbed people of the false premise that they don't know any trans people and therefore don't need to be respectful of trans people.

The historic nature of her nomination should not be lost on anyone, but Dr. Levine thoroughly deserves to be confirmed on the strength of her qualifications.

Despite several attacks on her gender identity over the past year, Dr. Levine has stayed laser-focused on helping the State of Pennsylvania manage and respond to COVID. The quality of her public service is reflected in the fact that she was confirmed not once, not twice, but three times by the Republican-led State senate to serve first as physician general and then as health secretary.

The U.S. Senate should follow suit today and make Dr. Levine the Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on one more issue, I was just over at the Rules Committee hearing. It is the first hearing I attended as majority leader because it was about S. 1, so important. And there, I showed—I showed my anger and frustration at what Republican legislatures are attempting to do throughout the country, take away people's right to vote, particularly people of color.

You know, it has been more than 160 years since the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments abolished slavery, but Jim Crow is still with us. When a State says you need a notary public to cast an absentee ballot, it is no different than asking African Americans to guess the number of jellybeans in the jar before they vote. It is certainly no different in intent to deprive them of their right, their constitutional right to vote.

And here we have Republican Senators making excuses for these vicious and often bigoted deprivations of the right to vote. They say that this is a State issue. No, Congress has passed numerous laws dealing with Federal

voting rights, and, in fact, the Constitution explicitly says that the Congress has the ability and right to do it. And yet Republicans who lost the election, instead of doing what we should be doing in a democracy—when you lose, you are supposed to figure out why you lost and win over the voters you didn't, but they would just deprive the voters who voted against them of the right to vote. That is eerily reminiscent of what dictators like Erdogan in Turkey or Orban in Hungary would do.

Our Republican Party has sunk so low that they have a Republican leader who is over in the Rules Committee defending these actions by State legislatures.

I asked him and all the Republicans to give us a reason. Why did the Georgia Legislature only pick Sundays to say there should be no early voting on Sunday? We know why. It is because that is the day African Americans vote in the "souls to the polls" operation, where they go from church to vote. It is despicable.

Every time you think the country has moved a long way, you see steps taken backward. Let's make no mistake about it, the shadow of Donald Trump—his big lie, his incessant focus on doing anything that benefits him, no matter if it is the truth or not, if it is constitutional or not, if it is racist or not—has now fallen over this party, and they are not even standing up to protect the sacred right to vote.

Shame, shame, shame on all of them. Shame. How can you defend these actions throughout legislatures, which the Washington Post said would amount to tens of millions of people losing their right to vote?

Are we a democracy? Are we? The shadow of Donald Trump falls dark and large over this caucus when they act like that, and it happens far too often. We will not let this stand. We will not let this stand. S. 1 will pass this body.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the

Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nominations en bloc, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Rachel Leland Levine, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services; and David Turk, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of Energy.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I have come down to the floor multiple times in the past week to talk about the filibuster. I have talked a lot about the dangers of eliminating the filibuster, from the loss of bipartisanship to the loss of meaningful representation for Senate minorities and the constituents they serve.

One thing I haven't mentioned yet, though, is the fact that Democrats are increasingly calling for eliminating the filibuster despite the fact that Republicans haven't actually filibustered any legislation yet this Congress.

In fact, the Democratic leader was just down here talking about attacking the Republicans for opposing H.R. 1, S. 1, or whatever it is that is the election bill that Democrats have put forward, but there hasn't been any effort that I am aware of to reach out to Republicans to talk about things that they might want to be involved with in terms of election reforms or reforming our election system in this country. In fact, this last election, we saw record turnout. Millions of people more than the previous election came out and voted. It was run by the States across the country.

The proposal that is before us, the H.R. 1 proposal—now, I guess, S. 1—would attempt to federalize that election process, to nationalize the elections, to take the power away from the States that currently administer and run elections and have that run out of Washington, DC.

It seems to me that a lot of people across this country would rather deal with State leaders, State Governments, when it comes to administering our elections than having them run out of Washington, DC.

There are lots of other provisions in that bill that many of us would object to. I think, frankly, it is a good thing to have a photo ID to vote. That is something that my State of South Dakota has. I think it makes sense, when people come in to vote, to be able to prove who they are. Obviously, it is a voter fraud prevention measure that has been adopted by many States across the country and upheld by the courts.

It just strikes me that there are a lot of provisions in that bill that would need to be fixed, honestly. And, frankly, just the very premise to have the Federal Government running elections in this country, essentially taking over something that has been historically handled by the States, strikes me that

that would be something the American people would have a lot of issues with.

Now, I am not sure exactly what, given the fact that we had millions more voting in the 2020 election than the previous Presidential election, would suggest that we need to make changes to election laws across this country.

The States, in my view, when they certified the election, like they typically do, in the 2020 election, did it on time, in accordance with the law, and the system, I believe, worked pretty well. But the Democrats seem to believe that there need to be changes in our elections.

But my point, simply, with respect to their arguments about that and about the need to eliminate the filibuster in order to do it is that we haven't filibustered anything yet.

Now, Democrats, when they were in the minority the last 6 years, filibustered most things that we brought up that were of major consequence, legislation that they objected to. They have used the filibuster prolifically—prolifically, you could say—in the last 6 years. But it seems a little bit odd to have them getting up and talking about eliminating something that has been a part of Senate history, Senate rules, Senate traditions for a really long time and arguing that the reason they need to do that is that Republicans have been abusing it when we have been in the majority.

We have been in the majority for the last 6 years. The filibuster is a tool employed by the minority and was employed, I would say, very freely by the minority in the past 6 years. We haven't filibustered—Republicans haven't filibustered anything yet, legislation, in this Congress. Yet Democrats are talking about eliminating the filibuster and, frankly, without attempting to reach across the aisle and engage in talks with Republicans about areas where we might find common ground. So that is what I want to talk just a little bit about today because I think Republicans have shown a genuine commitment to bipartisanship and unity, something that has not been on display from the President or the Democrat leadership.

The Senate confirmed President Biden's Cabinet nominees faster than those of both President Trump and President Obama, thanks in no small part to Republicans' willingness to move the process along, and many, if not most, of those confirmations were bipartisan.

I voted for a number of President Biden's Cabinet nominees not because they were the individuals I would have picked but because I believe that, absent serious red flags, a President deserves to have his team around him.

So I have a suggestion for Democrats: Why not try bipartisanship? And by that I don't mean holding Republicans hostage the way the Democratic leader has threatened, quote, "Support our legislation or we will talk about eliminating the filibuster."

I don't mean passing a few pieces of bipartisan legislation for show and then showing through the rest of your agenda or trying to—I should say showing through the rest of your agenda through reconciliation or abolishment of the filibuster; I mean genuine bipartisanship: sitting down at the table, identifying big issues that we need to address, and then looking at proposals from both parties—both parties—and negotiating until we can find agreement. There is a lot of room for that.

While the focus often tends to be on the areas where we disagree, there are plenty of areas where Democrats and Republicans either already agree or could easily reach middle ground.

I am a conservative, but I have introduced 14 bills so far this year, and 11 of them have had Democrat cosponsors.

There is a lot of room for us to work together, so why don't Democrats try that? We could start with American economic competitiveness and global leadership legislation or infrastructure legislation—issues that both Democrats and Republicans see a pressing need to address.

The Democratic leader has mentioned his desire to bring up legislation regarding America's competitiveness vis-a-vis China, and the Republican leader has agreed that it is an issue ripe for a bipartisan, regular-order process.

There are a lot of areas where we could find bipartisan agreement on these issues: investing in our domestic manufacturing capacity so we don't have to rely as heavily on China or other countries for essential products and technologies, promoting the development of 5G technology here at home to ensure the United States wins the race to 5G, supply chain security, protecting our taxpayer-funded research and intellectual property from theft, and more.

I recently introduced the bipartisan Network Security Trade Act with Senator FISCHER and Democratic Senators STABENOW and WARNER. Currently, one of the biggest suppliers of 5G equipment worldwide is a Chinese company, Huawei, which is supported by the Chinese Communist Party. American security officials have raised concerns that much of Huawei's equipment is built with "backdoors," giving the Chinese Communist Party access to global communications networks. Our bill would address this potential security risk by making telecommunications security a key objective when negotiating future trade deals.

It is important that we encourage our trading partners and allies to keep suspect technology like Huawei out of their networks. The bipartisan Network Security Trade Act would be a strong candidate for inclusion in a thoughtful, bipartisan measure meant to enhance our competitiveness with China if Democrats are willing to engage in truly bipartisan legislating.

I believe a strong China policy is a national priority, and I hope we will